

CAMPS

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Camp Chappa Challa

Jan. 1. 1962  
1962

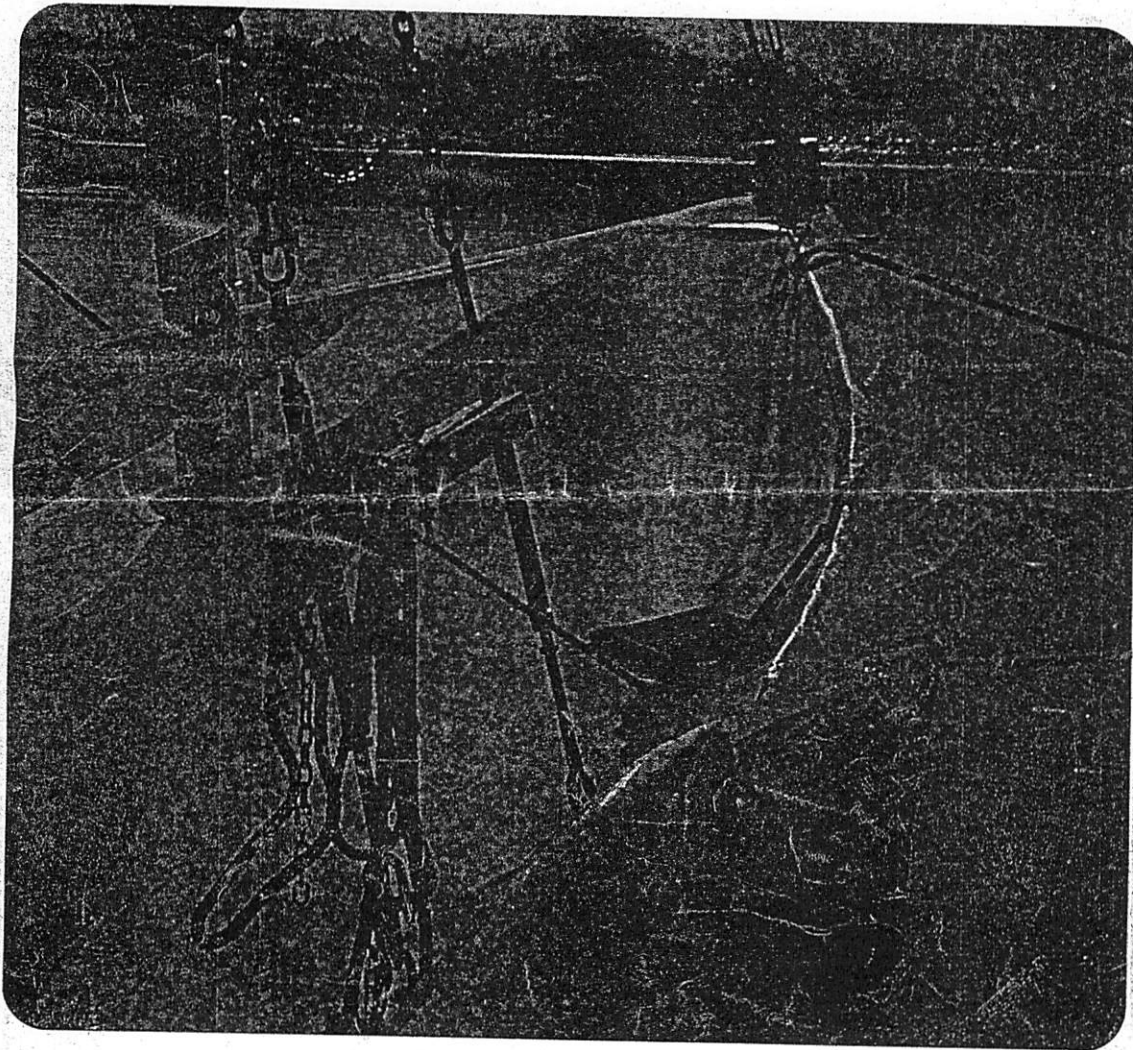
# Herald

Magazine of the Sunday Herald Traveler / January 16, 1972

P<sup>6</sup> Chappa Challa

The Haven for  
Lost Teens at  
Chappa Challa

The Making of  
a Death Camp  
Kommandant



Dawe

by Nancy Anne-Daw

The telephone rang late on a July afternoon at Walden III, the hotline for troubled people in Duxbury. A counselor from a South Shore counseling service was on the line: He had a case involving a young girl with whom he was getting nowhere, and could the hotline help?

The man who answered knew just where to turn, and transferred the call to the Rev. Kenneth Reed, a Catholic priest, who last summer was operating a haven for alienated and disturbed youth at Camp Chappa Challa in Duxbury.

That was how 13-year-old Stacy, a girl who could not communicate with her family, began her Chappa Challa experience.

Until 1964 Chappa Challa had been a Duxbury summer sailing camp, but had since become private property. It was leased last summer by the Walden III board of directors. Its six acres of land included green woods, expansive fields, a salt marsh, 10 cabins, five administrative buildings and a dirt road that ran its length, ending in a sandy beach with a view of estuarine marshes and Duxbury Bay beyond.

For Father Reed it also held an answer. It could be a perfect place for pre-delinquent young people to reassess their lives.

Working with kids was nothing new for Father Reed, S.V.D., of Duxbury's Miramar. For years he had worked in the "Teens Encounter Christ" program, and had directed the Encounter program in Chicago from 1966 until he came to Duxbury in 1967. His ministry to young people all over the state was well known and respected.

He also knew his way around the drug scene, and had helped establish New Bedford's Project Lighthouse, a temporary home for kids coming off drugs or with other problems.

To man, the task that faced Father Reed seemed impossible. In May the idea had come to him to make Chappa Challa a summer shelter for runaways, alienated youth, or kids seeking drug rehabilitation. Time was a problem, and to a friend who strolled the property with Ken (as he is known to everyone) in mid-June, there didn't seem to be

enough of it for a scheduled July 5th opening.

The tour revealed cabins with chinks in their roofs, dirt everywhere, administrative buildings that housed only a few old beds and chairs with the stuffing falling out. There was no hot water, no toilets hooked up, no stove or refrigerator, no kitchen, utensils, sheets, blankets, or towels. And there were shortly to be about 25 people living here.

But these problems didn't deter Ken, and walking through a field of hay and daisies, arms spread wide, he exclaimed, "And this will be our garden!" The friend stooped, plucked a daisy from that field, and fastening it into the buttonhole of Ken's green fatigue shirt, said, "O.K., St. Francis!"

The next week the garden was plowed—by a volunteer, of course. Then, driving up from New Bedford one day in an old truck, Ken spotted a farmer standing by a manure pile. Slamming on his brakes, pointing to the pile, he asked, "Hey, can I have some of that?" Thus was the garden fertilized.

A staff was quickly assembled. From New Bedford and Project Lighthouse came Miss Arlene Arruda, a 25-year-old social worker. If Ken was Chappa Challa's heart, she was its soul.

From Yale came 23-year-old Morrison Bump. Sitting on the steps of Duxbury's St. John's Episcopal Church one June day, talking to its pastor, the Rev. Lewis Mills, "Bump" wondered what to do with his summer. Hearing of Chappa Challa, he signed on and became a strong member of the team. He could be seen all summer driving a bright red truck with white-lettered "Chappa Challa" on its doors from the dump to the postoffice, to housepainting jobs, with the resident kids filling the back.

From Mt. Holyoke came psychology major Lynne Doran. A soft-spoken Duxbury girl, she was to have many late night "raps" with troubled girls.

Tall, blond Peter Shields of Hingham had graduated from Massachusetts Junior College and was heading for Boston State. He had met Ken through the "Teens Encounter Christ" program, and had seen him often. "I was impressed by his naturalness," Pete said. Pete was the "tin-

# The Chappa Challa Experience

*It lasted only one summer, but it changed profoundly the lives of everyone who came in touch with it*

kerer" of Chappa Challa and could usually be found poking in a car engine.

"I'm not just a house painter," said Braintree's 21-year-old Ed Dillon, who nevertheless was lending his talent to Chappa Challa for the summer as work director. Having completed three years at the Boston campus of the University of Massachusetts, he was about to take a year off and finish a novel he was writing. Mustached, with curly sideburns and hair, he is dominated by blue eyes that suggest both his wit and seriousness.

Two who knew the real horrors of the drug scene were Fairhaven's Bob (Bash) Bachand and Needham's Peggy Knowlton. "Bash" at 18 is quiet and steady, and one liked to try and make him laugh. Peggy's blonde good looks combined with an intelligent mind. She, too, was 18. She was a friend of the son of the owner of the property, had "heard what was going on, came down to take a look, and stayed on." She was to become an "ace" on the staff.

Two recent high school graduates were Theresa (Terry) Edera, a ballet student by day and a Chappa Challa staff member by night; and Gordon Starr, a liberal arts major at B.U. who came down "as a volunteer for three days looking for something better to do than nothing," and decided to stay. "Gordie" brought his potter's wheel with him, and it was to be put to good use.

By the end of June the tempo around Chappa Challa had increased. The staff had moved in, there were more cars around the building that

had been selected as the office, and these dashed in and out on many errands. A buzz saw could be heard busily working.

Help was suddenly coming from everywhere. A large freezer was donated; one man skilled in carpentry walked the empty buildings one night making five pages of notes on where to put the kitchen, what permits would be needed, what repairs necessary. From the Duxbury Rotary Club came a washing machine; from others came a stove, refrigerator, sink, and offers of manual help. The weekly newspaper Duxbury Clipper gave free column space each week to keep the community informed of Chappa Challa's activities. One gentleman rushed to have his truck repaired so he could spray the nearby vegetation to keep the camp free of mosquitoes; one lady, hearing that the kitchen had "nothing," didn't know why, but was convinced it was her job to find the needed implements. Within two days all were collected, from silverware to soup ladles, and transferred from the back of her station wagon to the temporary shelves of the kitchen. A Duxbury architect drew the floor plan for the kitchen building; a Duxbury lawyer drew up the lease that secured the property for the summer. Even the weather cooperated: a wet, cool spring giving way to one sunny day after another as the staff prepared the camp.

If Ken Reed is a lover of God and man, he is also a plumber, and it was this talent that he put to immediate use. He hooked up the toilets

and got the showers working, while the staff aired bedding, planted the garden, cleaned cabins, prepared one of the administrative buildings for a recreation hall, and painted orange crates with bright red "Chappa Challas" to distribute to local churches for a collection of donated canned goods.

To save time during the day because the stove had not been hooked up and all their meals had to be cooked over an outdoor open pit, Ken asked Duxbury ladies to provide lunch for himself and the staff. As one hostess dished up dessert, she asked where the troubled kids were going to be coming from to fill the 15 places the camp was preparing for them.

"We don't know," said "Bump." "You mean you're going to play it by ear?" she asked. "No," he answered quietly, "by heart."

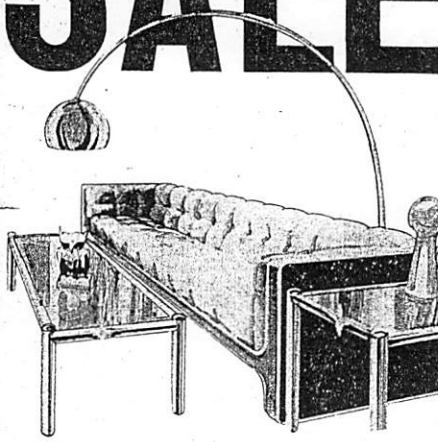
On July 5, as most of the residents of Duxbury were enjoying the traditional parade down the town's main street, Chappa Challa quietly opened its doors. Pink leaflets had been distributed through the churches outlining the aims of the project as a temporary shelter service for youths 18 years and under, where there would be individual counseling, group "raps" and recreation facilities.

Though no payment would be required, all residents—who had to have parental consent—would be expected to participate in the daily responsibilities necessary for maintaining the camp. At first there were two resident kids, then six, 10, 13, and finally the full complement of 15. Though most were scheduled to stay for three-week intervals, some remained the entire summer. They came from many towns and in various ways. Some were referred by churches; others by social agencies. Arlene brought one directly from juvenile court. She was there one day on another case, spotted 14-year-old Mike, thought he would fit into Chappa Challa, and asked the judge to let her take him with her. Knowing Arlene and her work, he consented.

To assist the staff, there were other volunteers who came in daily: women to cook meals, others to man the office with its telephone and notebook in which all visitors and residents had to sign in and out. In addition, Ken had

Continued on page 8

# WINTER SALE



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## The Chappa Challa Experience

CONTINUED

Ken Reed was more than just a priest, he was a plumber as well, and he put this talent to good use at Chappa Challa

lined up families, each to live one week in a cabin, to expose the kids to a "stable family situation, which some have never seen." There had been advance role-playing sessions to prepare them all for situations that might arise. "These were mostly for adults," said an 18-year-old college girl volunteer as she weeded the zinnia patch by the office door. "cause kids understand more." She was right. For one 50-year-old woman, the first day's duty was a painful experience. "When I got home I felt like tissue paper. I stood in my shower and sobbed."

Believing that work is rehabilitation, Chappa Challa took on jobs. There was a salt marsh on their property to be saved, roofs on the cabins to be repaired and reshingled, houses in town to be painted under Ed Dillon's direction.

All did not run smoothly at Chappa Challa. Troubled kids have short attention spans and work was a real "hassle." Some didn't obey curfew and had to be "grounded." There was an incident of stealing; the boy was promptly dismissed. Another took a knife from the kitchen intending to use it on someone else, but Arlene got it back. There were crying jags, and "when there was excitement in one part of the camp, you felt it everywhere."

Money was a continuing problem. There was no original funding, and though Arlene had written a proposal to the state, which had excess funds for drug rehabilitation centers, no return could be expected before October. A post-office box was set up and checks of \$10, \$15, \$25 came in. One \$800 donation was quickly eaten up with the purchase of a hot water heater, vinyl flooring for the kitchen, and food for the always-hungry Chappa Challeites.

The kids decided to help themselves by having a bake sale. Using the kitchen of the Episcopal Church, they spent one whole day baking huge mounds of honey-wheat bread. These loaves, and the other cakes, pies, cookies, and garden products that were donated, netted them \$125.

One Saturday morning, the camp learned from the Rotary Club that the caterers' for their annual auction—due that day—had defaulted. In 30 minutes, Chappa Challa was in the refreshment business, and because most of the supplies had

been donated, they were \$150 richer by day's end.

Wednesday night, July 28th, was perhaps a typical night, a quiet night at Chappa Challa.

One woman friend of the camp described that night: "When I arrived at 7:30 I had a cup of coffee with 'Bump', who then left to take home Rick, a boy who was ending his stay. I helped 'Terry' Edera and a girl named Donna do the dishes and clean up the kitchen. Donna was in a high-powered mood. As a child, she had been beaten by her father when she cried. If she then tried to smile, he would beat her for that. She had invented another person inside herself, and then had drifted into drugs. Off heroin, she was making a recovery, but this night was talking constantly of how her friends had "freaked out" her parrot on drugs, causing it to walk upside down in its cage after that."

I went into the small office and listened to Arlene explaining the camp to a teacher, a sun-tanned pixie enveloped by the armchair, who had come to volunteer tutoring services. "Patience is the only thing that works," Arlene began. "We don't impose anybody on anybody. If your approach is calm and you don't come on like an authority figure, you'll be all right. Don't be surprised at anything you see. People you have conflicts with, just avoid. Sometimes kids do strange things . . . find the person responsible for them. There's nothing to be afraid of, but one kid can trigger off all the rest. The staff meets three times a week and we know what's going on. The kids have to do dishes twice a week. If they try to get out of it, the dishes wait for them. We have more boys than girls here, but I don't know why. If you could give them some biology, math, history, to get them back in the groove . . ."

The office was now full of people. Pete Shields was at the desk on the phone; "Bash" and I were sitting shoulder to shoulder on the day bed that doubled as the sofa.

Donna was repeating her parrot story word for word, when Lynne Doran came in, accompanied by Stacy, the girl whose case had come in over the hotline. Statuesque, pretty, aloof, looking five years older than her 13 years she had just returned from uptown with some Laredo tobacco to roll her own cigarettes. It was her first night at Chappa Challa. "Keep that tobacco in your own cabin," Arlene warned, "or you'll lose it."

Cars and a motorcycle came and went, Arlene jumping up each time to investigate. "This is rally night here tonight," she said. Two boys entered, one bringing \$60 with him. He had worked for a week at Duxbury's Coffee House and was donating his pay. "Wow! That'll buy our groceries next week," a jubilant Arlene said, but her eyes never left the face of his friend who jabbered constantly.

When they left she said, "His friend is speeding." "Bash" looked at me. "That's diet pills. You know, in every medicine cabinet in America." "Not in mine," I said. "Well, you're different. My mother had two kinds." Donna was dancing across the floor, clicking her fingers and singing, "I'm an angel, with a halo . . ." Pete quietly cut through with, "Who came in today?"

At 9:30, Ken arrived back from a meeting. He, Arlene and I went into the kitchen, and over bowls of blackberry Jello I asked if there was any hope for Donna. "Yes! She knows when she cries now it's not another person, but only her emotions," Arlene said.

Ken and I came out into the sweet, moist earth smells of that July night and drove the short distance down the dirt road to his cabin. Suddenly, from Arlene: "Ken! Ken! Donna's disappeared! She's not in camp!"

Grabbing a flashlight with one hand and me with the other, for it was pitch black, Ken began to search for her. We looked in cabins; in one, a deeply troubled boy named Will had climbed between the sheets of a temporarily vacant

### The Door to Fine Kitchens

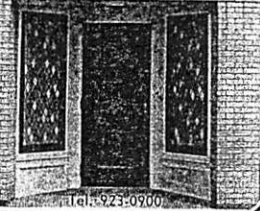
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girl's bed, and was asleep. "He's full of hostility, and very unstructured, but we've got him to the place where he will at least wash his hands every day. . . . Donna's doing this for attention. . . . Something's set her off." Another cabin revealed Betty and Deane Laitinen, the resident family for the week, quietly playing cards by candlelight, their little daughter asleep on a nearby bed, a peaceful tableaux. "I've found her, Ken," shouted Arlene, and we returned to his cabin.

"You must remember that these are patients, only ambulatory," Ken said. "Rick, who left today, is 18, and his mother never let him grow up. Remember what it says in The Prophet? It's like putting an arrow into a bow and aiming it, but then you must let it fly. . . . While he was here he took an overdose of aspirin. We gave him ipecac, which made him violently sick, and heard him retching all night. But he'll always associate an overdose of anything with unpleasantness. . . . I've got a lot of thank you notes to write tonight. . . ."

With that, he saw me to my car. I lay in bed that night unable to sleep, my mind so full of impressions.

And that had been a quiet night at Chappa Challa.

All who came to Chappa Challa in the summer of 1971—volunteers, staff, residents alike—both learned and taught, and there were some whose lives would never be quite the same again. Stacy was to write:

*A volunteer  
tutor was told:  
"Don't be surprised  
at anything  
you see"*

"I've been at Chappa Challa for two weeks. Chappa Challa is like one big happy family. I've never in my life seen so many kids loving each other so much. I came here because I ran away and a social worker told me that Chappa Challa might be a good place for me to go to be away from home so I could think about things and 'get my head together.'"

"At first I thought Chappa Challa wouldn't be as good as it is. I thought it would be like a jail; but it isn't. There's

good food and nice people. There is a lot of freedom if you become a member of the community and abide by the three rules: no drugs, no liquor, and abide by curfew.

"During a typical day, we work in the morning. . . . Then after lunch we do a lot of talking, and we go swimming, fishing, clamming, and boating. At night we sit and talk or sing, and sometimes we go sailing . . . or for a walk.

"All the people here talk to me, and I came out of my shell, and I can talk to them."

After Chappa Challa closed its doors Sept. 5, 24 of the 25 kids who had lived there returned to school. The 25th, a boy, is living with a Duxbury school teacher, working full time, and hopes to start evening school next semester.

"The results of the camp were miraculous in the number of kids who were placed in Duxbury homes because of associations formed at Chappa Challa," said Ken. One of these, a boy who had failed miserably in school last year, received two A's, a B+, and a C+ on his fall report card.

There were other results: the Plymouth Area of Region VII, Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, was impressed by the Chappa Challa concept of 24-hour-available counseling. It is seriously pursuing the suggestion of a permanent residential program. If such an idea becomes reality, Ken has been asked to coordinate the effort.

"For some time, many of us in drug rehabilitation have seen the need for a sizable farm, away from city streets and 'pushers,' with a number of outbuildings for animals, and yet some availability to transportation. After being originally funded, it should be self-supportive," he says.

As yet that remains a dream. But for last summer at least, Chappa Challa was like a prism, which caught the light of love and reflected it in many ways. In gifts of fruit and flowers, and a flashlight searching for a frightened girl. In Peggy Knowlton, sitting in the office armchair, smoke curling from her cigarette, counseling parents twice her age. In Ed Dillon saying, "I might not understand all these kids' emotional problems, but what I can be is, I can be a friend."

There was the telephone man who came to plug in the phones who returned day after day on his lunch hour; and the mother of six children who came in weekly to fix meals, taught Donna to sew, and took her home to live at summer's

end. And it was a baptism.

Peggy Knowlton said, "No one has ever 'rapped' with me about religion before, but after spending the summer with Ken and Arlene, I KNOW there's a God." At 7 p.m. one Sunday evening, at her own request, with Fr. Kenneth

Reed officiating, and the Rev. Lewis Mills assisting, with her family and all the Chappa Challa residents in attendance, she was baptized in the salt water of Chappa Challa's own beach.

That was the Chappa Challa Experience.

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Some of the  
Chappa Challa  
staff and volunteers



Father Ken Reed,  
the "heart" of  
Chappa Challa



This became the  
Kitchen-Dining Hall  
building



"Bump" with the  
truck of all  
purposes



That's Ed Dillon in  
plaid shorts on a job  
with resident kids



Arlene Arruda,  
the "soul" of  
Chappa Challa



Rev. Lewis Mills  
(left) with Father  
Ken Reed



Peggy Knowlton  
became an "Ace"  
on the staff



House painting  
crew working with  
Ed Dillon